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## ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE AGAINST THE HOUSE WREN

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Without due warning concerning the deadly menace that the House Wren is to its bird neighbors, little children, as well as older people, have been urged to provide for wrens nesting boxes, that facilitate their breeding in numbers out of all proportion to other bird life. It was with a hope of checking in some degree a most dangerous practice that six months ago I wrote to ask that wren boxes be abandoned. The most that this urged was a halt in the breeding of House Wrens. There is nothing in that appeal that ought to lead a candid mind to imagine that I am bent on the extermination of this wren. I am not bent on the extermination of any species of birds, but I am convinced that the welfare of our small birds calls for the banishment of the House Wren from our gardens and dooryards.

It may be in place here to say that although I have studied the House Wren long and closely I have caught him in acts of destruction less frequently than some people have, who have studied him less. The catching of him "red-handed" seems largely to be a matter of chance or good luck. Not more than two or three persons in a hundred million have the patience to watch him until detection comes. Besides sufficient of the in-the-act detection I have had a large amount of circumstantial evidence, indisputable proofs of his handiwork. (Now let all wren addicts have spasms over the use of "handiwork", a word strictly applicable to man and monkeys only, yet the word "billiwork" has not been coined, nor have many other words, that might better express ideas relating to birds. Our language is based largely on concepts of human life, relations, and ideals. However, it is quite safe to say that those who know the House Wren most thoroughly will agree upon the appropriateness for him of the imagery called up by the words "felon, criminal, demon, and devil".)

Unquestionably there are grades of viciousness in certain families, whether bird or human. The infamous Jukes family may be cited for illustration of the latter. Against filling the earth with a population of this sort eugenists cry aloud, but their protests do not call

forth the contemptuous leering of incredulity that greets like efforts to limit the breeding of the House Wren. Additional evidence of the viciousness of this species tends to show that it is its diabolical disposition alone that prompts it to destructive acts. The theory of "territory" held by some of us receives a severe jolt from testimony coming from localities in which this wren is a newcomer as a breeding species. On about the same date last spring three bird magazines published three most convincing testimonies on this point. One article from Brookfield, Mass., tells of the havoc played on the writer's home place by the first nesting pair of House Wrens. These wrens destroyed the eggs of Tree Swallows, Robins, and Chipping Sparrows. From Hillsboro, Ohio, was reported the routing from their ancestral home of a nesting pair of Bewick's Wren by the arch-demon wren. History repeats itself. At Hillsboro the House Wren upon first appearance drove out the Bewick's Wren exactly as it did at Olney, Illinois, fifty years ago, and as it will most likely do fifty centuries hence, if then there remains any of the former species for it to dispossess. From Carlisle, Indiana, comes the history of the first appearance there of breeding House Wrens, which immediately destroyed a Chickadee's nest. This was several years ago and no Chickadee ever returned to nest. Verily, it is a requiem that this wren constantly sings, and its words are "Never more; Never more".

Rarely has the House Wren been seen sucking the eggs it has pierced. Two instances in which it played this nefarious role are at hand. Mrs. H. C. Beardslee, of Perry, Ohio, has reported that recently she *saw* a wren sucking the egg of a Chipping Sparrow. Another occurrence, that also happened in Ohio, has been described in a letter from Mr. Willis H. Warner, which with his permission is published herewith.

April 29, 1925.

Dear Friend:

I regard your article in the March number of the WILSON BULLETIN of inestimable value. I can verify from personal observation all your counts against the wren, and at least one more, viz., that of egg-sucking.

For eighteen years I have been observing the malevolent nature of the House Wren. I have seen him pitch eggs out of martin houses; I have seen him go in and out of Bluebird houses, which were occupied, and deliberately tease the owners by the hour. And time and again, I have seen pierced Bluebird eggs on the ground with holes the size of a wren's bill. I have seen him pulling the hair lining out of a Chipping Sparrow's nest, the freshly pierced and broken eggs lying on the ground below; and I have had the experience of having a Robin's egg drop at my feet from a nest in a vine above, beside which was a wren. Repeatedly he has broken up Cardinals' nests in our dooryard.

One spring the Cardinal built her nest and had laid three eggs, before the arrival of the wren on the place. Hearing the wren song one evening, and knowing that incubation at the Cardinal's nest had not begun, I covered the nest with a rhubarb leaf. Having observed that the Cardinal went on her nest about 7:00 o'clock in the morning to lay her eggs, I removed the leaf at 6:00 next morning. Returning at 7:30 I found one pierced egg on the ground, the others gone. I had to leave at once, so could not search for them to see how far they had been carried.

May 3, 1920, a pair of Cardinals selected a nesting site in a bush honeysuckle about two feet from one of our windows, which afforded us a wonderful opportunity for observation. That the exhaust of a gasoline engine, which was used about ten minutes each morning for pumping water, was about six feet from the selected location, did not seem to disturb the Cardinals whatever. Deliberately the nest was completed, and on the twelfth of May the first egg was laid. Sometime during the afternoon the egg was pierced. We removed it, fearing that its presence might be the cause of abandoning the nest.

The next morning another egg was laid; and again that afternoon between 2:30 and 4:30 o'clock the egg was pierced, and a wren was near the nest when Mrs. Warner made the discovery. In the evening, just at dusk, we went to the window and there was the wren in the nest. He had his bill in the egg, and was humped over it in such a manner that we had difficulty in immediately recognizing him. We watched him for fully two minutes or more. His neck feathers moved at intervals, indicating that he was swallowing. Finally, I reached out cautiously in attempt to capture him: he saw me in time, however, and made his escape. I am sorry that I did not wait to see if he would carry away the shell, which we removed. The Cardinals abandoned the nest.

I have noticed that not more than one pair of House Wrens rule the doorway at one time. However, one summer there were nineteen wrens on the place, actual count: and not one wren was counted twice, I assure you!

I took down the wren houses long ago, and later, the Bluebird houses, for they merely attract wrens.

I am glad to refer your article to my friends and acquaintances who deplore my antipathy toward the dear little confiding (!) songster.

Yours most sincerely,

Willis H. Warner.

Canfield, Ohio.

The chief lesson, learned by me in the last half year from the new evidences brought against the House Wren, is that he is a blacker villain than I had thought him to be. His breaking up of nests by destroying the eggs is bad enough, his killing of unfledged nestlings is far worse. His evil activities seem to be unflagging. Early and late, from dawn till dark, he is busy seeking for mischief. Because he is a stranger in new territory is no check on his vicious conduct. For deadly work he is the rattlesnake of the bird world. Speaking of rattlesnakes, why should not little children be encouraged to raise them along with their House Wrens? The present demand seems to be for thrills, and yet more thrills. The rattle of the rattlesnake would



supply some of these thrills. Already a step in the direction of thrill-providing has been taken by the conservation society of one of our states, which proclaims its purpose to protect, develop, and conserve rattlesnakes. Its exact words are "*all native animals*", and no one denies that rattlesnakes are native animals.

Since the majority rules it would decree that an old lady of eighty or ninety years, who for sixty or seventy years has seen nothing blame-worthy in her wren, should not be discouraged from raising all the wrens she can. But what about the old ladies, living on either side of her, who would like to have some other little birds, but cannot because her wrens drive them away? They are too old to combat with gun and trap the evil ones she insists on raising. Surely others besides wren breeders ought to have rights that are recognizable. An alcohol or drug addict injures himself mainly, but a wren addict harms the entire neighborhood.

It would take some number consisting of four figures to enumerate the many happy hours I have spent with the Short-billed Marsh Wren. The only fly in an otherwise perfect ointment has been a lurking fear that this delightful little bird may possess bad traits similar to those of its cousin the Long-billed Marsh Wren or its more distant relative the House Wren. Should some trustworthy observer announce that many times he has seen the Short-billed Marsh Wren destroying the eggs of other birds this announcement would fill the day with deep sadness. Should this one observer be joined by scores and scores of other reliable witnesses, who testify to like observations their proofs would be convincing, but they would not be met by such sneers, and leers, and jeers as greet the presentation of the truth regarding the House Wren. Some people have called the Short-billed Marsh Wren shy. Long years of close companionship with him has led me to contrary conclusions. To no other bird of my acquaintance, except those fed by me, is so close an approach possible as there is to this little wren of the marshes. Far more agreeable would it be to spend time writing about his winning ways and little-known, but peculiar habits, than to spend that time in telling of the fiendish deeds of the House Wren. But in face of peril conscience will urge us to tasks that are neither pleasant nor profitable. There are people who deny that the earth is round, and there are other people who deny that the House Wren is a bad bird. It remains for teachers to choose between the presentations of these denials or of the truths that scientific investigations have proved.

NATIONAL, VIA MCGREGOR, IOWA.